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THE MUSICAL WORLD OF ARMENIANS IN CONSTANTINOPLE

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For the most part, the sultans of the Ottoman Empire determined the music that disseminated through all levels of Constantinople's multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. This trend began with the first sultans, who adopted the formalized medieval Persian-Arabic *maqam* (or *makam*)¹ as the official form of music for their vast empire. Musicians who followed the other musical traditions of the city still used the *maqam*, the classical music of the time, for instructional purposes.² In the employ of the sultans in the seventeenth century, court musicians and pedagogues belonging

¹ A highly developed form of Eastern oral musical tradition, *maqam* in Arabic refers to a standardized suite of improvised vocal and instrumental pieces expressed with melodic and rhythmic variations. It is also referred to as "Islamic maqam" because of its mystical character and possibly because it was performed in gatherings of religious people.

² A textbook in the late nineteenth century, for example, explained the fundamental characteristics of Armenian sacred songs with terminology used in Ottoman Turkish music. See Nikoghos Tahmizian, *Hakobos Ayvazyane ev nra arevelyan erazhshtutyany dzernarke* [Hagobos Ayvazian and His Manual on Eastern Music] (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1990), in Russian. Beyond the mere use of musical terminology, there was also an inclination to "correct" the medieval modal structure of Armenian sacred music to fit the Turkish tonal system. These two systems are incongruous since in Turkish music the octave is divided into 24 unequal intervals with complex ratios, whereas Armenian modes are built on the untempered diatonic scale, with dovetailed major tetrachords in various combinations of whole and half tone intervals, adding up to a decachord that avoids the tonic. Additionally, the slightly shortened first interval of the Phrygian tetrachord (EFGA) in a scale thus constructed creates narrowed and widened intervals, giving the Armenian modal structure its distinctive sound characteristics. The tempered scale has been in use since the middle of the nineteenth century. For illustrations, see Margarit Brudyan, *Hay zhoghovrdakan erazhshtakan steghsagortsutyun* [Creativity in Armenian Folk Music] (Erevan: Loys, 1983), pp. 16-22.

mainly to the Mevlevi order of Sufi mysticism³ modified the adopted maqam, with rhythms, modes, and melodies rooted in Turkish and ancient Anatolian folk music. Further, new musical ideas and styles found their way into Ottoman courts as the sultans expanded their reach through military conquest and international relations. As a result, by the eighteenth century, the maqam had taken distinctly Ottoman Turkish characteristics in both style and form.⁴ Thus, until the middle of the nineteenth century, the original and evolved versions of the maqam, coupled with the exclusive use of the Turkish language as mandated by the imperial government, defined the boundaries of all music in Constantinople.

The small émigré community of Armenian artisans in Constantinople had grown from its humble beginnings in the middle of the fifteenth century into the largest Armenian society outside the homeland, numbering up to a quarter million by the late nineteenth century.⁵ The Ottoman capital city eventually became the Western Armenian cultural and financial center. The upper and middle classes enjoyed refined lifestyles and an active cultural life, with numerous Armenian associations, publications, schools, churches, theaters, and concert halls. While the Armenian *zartonk* or cultural renaissance was in full bloom with impassioned nationalistic poetry and songs, Armenian music had not yet been cultivated. Even the intellectual and cultural elite heading the enlightenment movement were unaware of their own musical legacy: an oral tradition of secular and sacred songs, woven from distinctive threads of Armenian poetry, rituals, and social customs. Total immersion in the dominant Ottoman musical culture for four centuries had caused the loss of Armenian national musical identity. Thus they consumed westernized Turkish songs, Turkified Armenian sacred songs, French salon music, Italian opera arias, and the chamber music of Western instrumental ensembles.⁶ From a historical perspective,

³ The Mevlevi are an ascetic Muslim sect (also referred to as “whirling dervishes”) whose rituals in their monasteries are accompanied with vocal and instrumental music of the classical maqam.

⁴ For a history of Ottoman music, see Kurt and Ursula Reinhard, *Die Musik der Türkei* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1969).

⁵ See Maghakia Ormanian, *Hayots ekeghetsin* [The Church of Armenia], 6th ed. (Beirut: Sevan Press, 1960), p. 69.

⁶ Matevos H. Muradyan, *Urvagits arevmtahay erazhshutyan patmutyan (XIX dar ev XX daraskizb)* [Historical Outline of Western Armenian Music (19th Century and Early 20th Century)] (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1989), pp. 21-22.

the nineteenth century was a critical period in the evolution of Armenian music. Armenian musicians educated in the West returned to Constantinople with renewed creative energy and began to search for their own national musical roots—a process that ended abruptly in April 1915 with the arrest and deportation of the city's Armenian intelligentsia, including the famous musicologist Gomidas Vartabed (Komitas Vardapet).⁷ This essay provides an overview of the Armenian musical environment in Constantinople in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The growing popularity of Western music coincided with the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the *Tanzimat* reform period (1839–76).⁸ European music, at first reserved for performance in the sultan's palace, gradually became the preferred music for nearly the entire ruling class; and by the 1870s complemented the secularized Turkish *sharki*, *turki*, *peshref*, *semayi*, and *taksim*, which represented individual vocal and instrumental pieces included in a maqam. These were consumed by the city's upper economic class, Turks as well as other Ottoman nationalities, including Armenians, Greeks, and Jews. Nevertheless, the traditional Mevlevi order of Sufi mystics continued to teach and develop classical Ottoman Turkish music.

The Armenian *Ashugh*

Serving all levels of Constantinople society were Turkish-speaking Armenian *ashughs*⁹—poet-singer-instrumentalist-storytellers who,

⁷ Gomidas Vartabed (1869–1935) was an ordained celibate priest who learned the basics of music at the Gevorgian Seminary of Echmiadzin. He furthered his music education in the private conservatory of Richard Schmid in Berlin, where he received his doctorate in music theory after presenting his thesis on Kurdish music. He is the most prominent scholarly ethnomusicologist in Armenian musical history. His approach integrated both Eastern and Western musical traditions. Many of his findings were scattered or lost while he was tormented in a Turkish prison, followed by wasted years in Turkish and French sanatoriums. Only some of his works have survived. These include his presentations at musical conferences in Berlin and Paris, material he presented at the International Musical Society of Europe, short articles intended for Armenian newspapers, and reports of his lectures by others.

⁸ On the Tanzimat period, see Hagop Barsoumian, "The Eastern Question and the Tanzimat Era," in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, vol. 2: *Foreign Dominion to Statehood: The Fifteenth Century to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Richard G. Hovannissian (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), pp. 175–201.

⁹ The Armenian *ashughs*, successors to medieval Armenian *gusans*, were profes-

having spent years of apprenticeship with a master ashugh to sharpen their individual skills, entertained audiences in various settings. They accompanied their vocal improvisations and virtuoso performances on Eastern stringed instruments, including the *saz*, *tar*, *oud*, *kamancha*, *kemani*, *kanon*, *santur*, *zurna*, *ney*, and *tambur*. Each ashugh came to be identified by his favorite instrument, often made by himself; for example, Kemanı Tateos, Lavoutaji Ovrig, Oudi Arshag, Kanoni Nubar were prominent ashughs in Constantinople.¹⁰ They translated their repertoire into Turkish, and at times composed in that same language and style.¹¹ Being multilingual and adept at local dialects, they had the agility to satisfy the ever-changing popular tastes in Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia.

The most professional among the ashughs were often invited to perform and teach in the palaces of the sultan¹² and the mansions of the moneyed class of Armenian *amiras*.¹³ At times, the latter competed among themselves for the services of these celebrities. Their audiences included the wealthiest and most influential members in the capital. The ashughs entertained them with secular themes, although in some instances religious melodies did find their way into the sultan's palace. The favorite *hijaz*¹⁴ of Abdul Aziz (1861-76) was the "Sird im sasani," the elaborate *dagh-aria* from *votenlva*,¹⁵ which Kemanı Sepuh often played for him on his

sional performers in the oral tradition common to Eastern cultures. See Robert A. Atayan et al. eds., *Komitaskan*, 2 vols. (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1969, 1981), vol. 2: Manuk Manukyan, *Komitase ev hay ashughakan-gusanakan ergarvesti harazatutyan hartse* [Gomidas and the Question Regarding the Authenticity of the Ashugh-Gusan Vocal Art], pp. 231-32.

¹⁰ See "Arevelyan hay erazhishtner ev nvagatsuner 1768-1930 shrjanin" [Eastern Armenian Musicians and Instrumentalists in the 1768-1930 Period], *Surb Prkich*, monthly periodical of the Armenian National Hospital, Istanbul (March 2000): 23-31.

¹¹ Nikoghos Tahmizian, *Sayat Novan ev hay gusana-ashughakan erg-erazhshutiune* [Sayat Nova and the Armenian Gusan-Ashugh Song-Music] (Pasadena, CA: Drazark Press, 1995), p. 59.

¹² Ibid., p. 34.

¹³ Amiras were heads of wealthy dynastic families. They enjoyed great prestige as bankers and financial advisors to Turkish officials and held important positions in the government. Some prominent names associated with musical developments in Constantinople included the Dadian, Duzian, and Balian families.

¹⁴ Hijaz is a traditional Eastern melody built on a mode that is associated with a certain mood. The melody is developed with prescribed principles in improvisation.

¹⁵ This is a ritual in the Armenian Church, which reenacts the scene in which

violin.¹⁶ Ashughs who lacked advanced training served the migrant working classes congregated in the poor quarters of the city. These included the Armenian émigré community of Constantinople, which had fled Turkish and Kurdish exploiters in the interior provinces in hopes of finding better living and working conditions. Unnoticed by society, the members of this minority group within the Armenian community in the capital at first sang their songs in their regional dialects, heavily mixed with Turkish and Arabic words, but in time they adapted to the cultural environment and popular tastes of Constantinople.¹⁷

Unlike the professional ashughs discussed earlier, the ashughs performing for the migrant working class played multiple roles as priest, philosopher, and compatriot. They addressed the daily concerns of their listeners, protested the injustices of class distinctions by ridiculing the rich, inspired hope for social reforms, and preached self-reliance and patriotism, though in veiled language. They sang snatches of Armenian folk melodies in regional dialects familiar to their audiences, and while their repertoire included foreign epics they abridged them and Armenianized them with versification styles of Armenian poetry.

In the nineteenth century, there were about 300 Turkish-speaking Armenian ashughs in Turkey,¹⁸ attesting to their popularity across the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, their lower social status, as defined by the city's intelligentsia and upper socioeconomic classes, did not improve with the increasing demand for their services. It is possible that the religious segments of both Armenian and Turkish society did not approve of the ashughs' preoccupation with secular music and poetry. Furthermore, the Armenians had reservations about the Islamic origin of the repertoire, not to mention its "tasteless" performance style, which included nasal vocalization, sliding microtones, chromaticism, and excessive ornamentation of melodies. Despite the apparent popularity enjoyed by the ashughs, neither Turkish nor Armenian scholars have undertaken a comprehensive study of their contributions to Constantinopolitan music. Hundreds of Turkish language manuscripts exist that have been transcribed by ashughs in Armenian characters

Jesus washes the feet of his disciples as a symbolic act of humility.

¹⁶ See *Arevelyan hay erazhishtner*, p. 30.

¹⁷ Muradyan, *Urvagits*, p. 186.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 81.

and signed with Turkish, Persian, or Arabic pseudonyms.¹⁹

Armenian Folk Songs and Liturgical Music

Noticeably absent from Constantinople, however, were strains of Armenian folk song melodies, developed centuries earlier in the historic Armenian homeland and in Cilicia. These were songs improvised in the poetic style of the oral tradition in the regional dialect and the musical idiom of villages, distinguishable by their melodic, modal, and stylistic content. They were passed on from one generation to the next, repeated and modified social events and traditional rituals. Beyond their artistic merit, these indigenous songs contained invaluable bits of ethnographic information. These folk songs were distinctively Armenian, once etched into the memory of the émigrés, but now virtually neglected by the urbanized Armenian society of Constantinople.

The liturgical music of the Armenian Church in Constantinople could be heard not only in churches but also in the adjoining schools and occasionally in the mansions of the amiras. In all three settings, the medieval mystic songs of Armenian composers were performed in the secular style of Turkish popular music. Melodies were embellished with extraneous *fiorituras*, exaggerated emotive *melisma*, chromatic passages, excessive *portamenti*, and dragging tempi. In fact, these indulgences were carried to such extremes that the hymns (*sharagans*), sacred arias (*daghs*), and chants in the divine liturgy (*patarag; badarak*) performed in nasal vocalization reminded the worshipers of Turkish coffeehouses and casinos. Nothing different could reasonably be expected since those who took on the role of *diratsu*²⁰ in the church on Sundays were the same musicians who performed in the courts of the sultan and the amiras and in the casino and nightclubs during the week. Their admiring supporters, who often included Turkish officials, Mevlevi musicians and members of the city's religious minorities, followed them to church for the sheer pleasure of listening to their vocal improvisations.

Decrying the Armenian Church's tolerance for such indis-

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 17.

²⁰ *Diratsu* (*tiratsu*) is a church musician who assists the priest in conducting the Armenian Divine Liturgy.

criminate distortions of the original sacred chants, Hampardzum Limonjian,²¹ an early nineteenth century musician, complained that the beautiful sharagans had become the playthings of conceited church musicians who sang them improperly but acted as though the melodies had been passed on to them directly from Catholicos Nerses Shnorhali in the twelfth century: “They ignore the fact that our church music is beautiful and sublime in its simplicity. Why is it necessary to introduce in them inappropriate trills in imitation of this or that singer?”²² Witnessing this same abuse of Armenian liturgical music half a century later in “all locations of Turkish-Armenian churches, starting from the capital to the remote village churches,” Gomidas was equally critical of the diratsus: “They entered a race to surpass each other with arbitrary gurgles and trills, which contributed a great deal to the deterioration of the melody.”²³

Equally aggravating was the fact that these same diratsuashughs were entrusted with the musical education of prospective deacons and choristers. Gomidas complained that the “self-appointed musicians” imposed their “individual tastes” on their successors with “numerous *daghs*, *Der voghormias* . . . in short rites of the badarak, in Turkish *sharki*, *turki*, *mani*, *nani* melodies, which were carefully inscribed in notebooks . . . with ornate letterings, and passed on to their students as priceless treasures, heritage. . . .”²⁴ Gomidas was even more scathing in his review of a new badarak submitted to him by a diratsu, calling it “a pile of notes with no musical vitality, not to mention the complete disagreement between the melody and the central meaning of the text.”²⁵ At one

²¹ Hampardzum Limonjian (1768-1830) studied church music with Zenne Boghos Tbir. He entered the circle of Duzian Palace which was a meeting place for musicians. He became a protégé of Hovhannes Chalabi and studied Greek music with Vonoprios Psalti. His connection with the Sufi Dervish musicians was Hamami Zade Ismail Dede, from whom he learned the music of their rituals. Limonjian was considered the best performer of the *tambur* (a string instrument). See Muradyan, *Urvagits*, pp. 32-35.

²² Kristofor S. Kushnaryan et al., *Aknark hay erazhshtyan patmutyan* [A Survey of the History of Armenian Music], Pt. 2: Matevos H. Muradyan, *Hay erazhshtutyune XIX darum ev xx dari sgzbym*, [Armenian Music in the 19th Century and Beginning of the 20th Century] (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1963), pp. 73-217.

²³ Komitas, *Hodvatsner ev usumnasirutyunner* [Articles and Studies], ed. Ruben Terlemezyan (Erevan: Haypethrat, 1941), pp. 111-12.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 131-32.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 134.

point in his tirade against such practices, Gomidas stated: "This licentious period lasted from 1864 to 1873."²⁶ It is hard to tell if this was stated with a groan of distress or a sigh of relief. Thus, with the tacit approval of the Church in Constantinople, the vocal virtuosity of a secular foreign style had taken precedence over the established norms of chanting Armenian liturgical music—a norm that had been perpetuated for its ability to put the Christian Armenian faithful into a spiritual, introspective mood conducive to communication with God.

Secular and foreign musical styles had influenced Armenian sacred music throughout the centuries of its development, but they had always been tested against the established traditions, under the critical supervision of church authorities, and remained within the artistic boundaries set by a musically literate clergy. By the nineteenth century, however, the Armenian Church was denied the benefit of its monastic educational centers, once spread all over Armenia and Cilicia, and it had essentially lost its economic independence. As a result, the church could no longer maintain its own standards, which had once been achieved by the command the church leaders exercised on both the composition and the performance of hymns.²⁷

In Constantinople, the Armenian Church was left to its own devices. As the officially recognized Armenian religious institution in the Ottoman Empire, the Armenian Church was delegated the awesome responsibility of overseeing not only the religious but also the cultural, educational, social, and legal matters that related to the Armenian *millet* (confessional community).²⁸ Eventually unable to meet the challenges of the times, the Church had yielded much of its traditional leadership role to the secular segments of society. The most influential individuals were the Armenian amiras, who patronized religious, social, and cultural projects in the city. They even determined the aesthetic standards for liturgical music by appointing their favorite ashughs to the coveted posts of diratsu. Some nonetheless also supported a project to devise a new

²⁶ Ibid., p. 135.

²⁷ Egon Wellesz, "Music of the Eastern Churches," in *New Oxford History of Music*, vol. 2: *Early Medieval Music up to 1300*, ed. Don Anselm Hughes (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 52.

²⁸ The Patriarchate in Constantinople had jurisdiction over Armenians throughout the Ottoman Empire. See Ormanian, *Hayots ekeghetsin*, p. 70.

notation system to transcribe sacred melodies.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, a small group of scholarly Armenian musicians had alerted the amiras and the church to the glaring incompatibility between the style of singing and the spirit of the sacred texts. Prominent among these musicologists were Hampardzum Limonjian, Nigoghos Tashjian²⁹ and Yeghia Dndesian.³⁰ They occupied prestigious posts in the sultan's court and the Mevlevi lodge as composers, pedagogues, and music theoreticians. As protégés of the amiras, they also served in the church as diratsus and were distinguished from other musicians by their broad knowledge of sacred music, the canons of the Armenian and Byzantine churches, the chants of the local synagogue, the Greek neumes, and the European notation system. They were in contact with their counterparts in non-Armenian religious institutions and occasionally attended each other's sacred rituals and exchanged observations about the fundamental characteristics of their music. Backed by their experience, knowledge, research, and the support of like-minded musicians, these musicologists set out to remove foreign musical elements from the traditional Armenian spiritual melodies. Oral transmission had failed to preserve the character of the Armenian liturgical chants and hymns, and the practice of singing melodies off the *khaz* notations found in medieval manuscripts needed to be reinstated.³¹ Yet, nobody had been able to read the *khaz* symbols since the eighteenth century

²⁹ Nigoghos Tashjian (1836-1885) studied with Mevlevi Ismail Dede Efendi (1778-1846) and enrolled in the Imperial Music School patronized by Grand Vizier Ali Pasha. He was an authority on Mevlevi ritual and even taught dervish ceremonies in their lodge. Nigoghos and his brother published the Armenian journal *Ottoman Music* in 1875. Sixty-three of his *sharki* compositions have survived. He was active as teacher, diratzu, composer, editor, and contributor to Armenian journals. He is noted mainly for his expertise in the Armenian *khaz* notation. See Muradyan, *Aknark*, pp. 97-98.

³⁰ Yeghia Dndesian (1834-1881), a talented and prolific Church musician, was one of the earliest to transcribe church music in Armenian and European notations, some of which were published as early as 1864.

³¹ *Khaz* is the term used for notation symbols written above the text of Armenian liturgical chants, to guide the singing and secure the performance standard endorsed by the Armenian Church authorities. They appear mostly in manuscripts from the eighth through the fourteenth century, ranging from simple to complex symbols, indicating the evolutionary process in the composition and performance of Armenian sacred music. For a thorough discussion on medieval *khaz* notations, see Robert A. Atayan, *Haykakan khazayin notagrutyune* [Armenian Khaz Notation] (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1959), pp. 1-287.

due to the pillaging of monastic universities in Armenia and Cilicia and the subsequent collapse of the educational structure. In fact, no medieval textbook on the subject could be found, rendering any plans to decode the medieval notation system virtually impossible.

After much deliberation³² and dedicated effort, a committee of musicians headed by Limonjian devised a substitute notation system for both Armenian sacred hymns and the monophonic music of the region.³³ Mindful of national tradition, they lifted khaz symbols from medieval manuscripts and gave them new meanings borrowed from the European system of notation.³⁴ After testing its usefulness and in the process refining the symbols,³⁵ Nigoghos Tashjian employed the new khaz system to transcribe the chants in *Zhamakirk* (breviary), *Sharaganots* (hymnal), and *Badarak* (Divine Liturgy) in three volumes, relying on the vocal renditions of Catholicos Gevorg IV of Echmiadzin, formerly of Constantinople, as his primary source.³⁶ While Yeghia Dndesian's compilation of notated sharagans was still under consideration, Tashjian published all three volumes (1874-78) in Vagharshapat and received the approval of the Catholicos for their use in all Armenian churches. This decision promised to ensure a uniform performance standard for Armenian churches worldwide, but the church in Constantinople rejected it, preferring instead to use the familiar style. Dndesian's volume, published posthumously in 1934, is valued for its scholarly approach to selecting melodic variants believed to reflect more closely the original intent of the medieval composers.³⁷

³² Topics for deliberations were whether existing Greek neumes should be adopted or new khaz symbols designed for the purpose of serving the monodic music of Eastern cultures as well and whether the new khaz should be reserved expressly for Armenian sacred songs or whether the European notations should be adopted, their being accessible internationally and preferable for possible homophonic arrangement of Armenian sacred songs. See Mouradian, *Aknark*, p. 82.

³³ Members in this committee were: Aristages Hovhannesian, Yeghia Dndesian, Hampardzum Cherchian, Gabriel Yeranian, and Nigoghos Tashjian. They were among the first to use the New Notation System. See Aleksandr Shahverdyan, *Hay erazhshutyan patmutyan aknarkner, XIX-XX dar* [Survey of the History of Armenian Music, 19th-20th Centuries], ed. Robert A. Atayan (Erevan: Haypethrat, 1959), pp. 336-37.

³⁴ Komitas, *Hodvatsner ev usumnasirutyunner*, p. 128.

³⁵ For the interpretation and practical usage of these symbols, see Muradyan, *Urvagits*, pp. 34-41.

³⁶ See Tahmizian, *Sayat Novan*, p. 63n78.

³⁷ Muradyan, *Urvagits*, pp. 107-08.

Some considered these developments as interim measures. In many ways the forerunner of Gomidas, Dndesian devoted his life to the study of medieval khaz notations in the libraries of the Jerusalem, Echmiadzin, and Mekhitarist monasteries. Gomidas gave serious consideration to Dndesian's writings on the subject,³⁸ while he conducted his own research for twenty years.³⁹ Both made substantial advances toward decoding the khaz, but neither musicologist was able to publish his findings.⁴⁰ Dndesian was arrested for nationalistic sentiments in his publications and met an untimely end in a Turkish prison in 1881.⁴¹ Gomidas lost the will to pursue a creative and scholarly life soon after his traumatic experiences during the Armenian Genocide. But before their tragic ends, their exhaustive pursuit of the key to the mystic medieval past of Armenian music was motivated by a conviction that the recovered music would show the intrinsic beauty of these chants and would reveal the distinguishing features of what may be defined as truly Armenian sacred music. Khaz-notated medieval manuscripts were considered the only dependable source of reference in scholarly research and analysis concerning Armenian music and musicology, and they contained the unquestionably authentic style of singing the Armenian Divine Liturgy.

All these concerns and achievements related to sacred music were of no interest to the younger generation of Western educated Armenian musicians. Expectations that Armenian musicology could be defined on the basis of orally transmitted hymns, only recently transcribed with newly devised khaz symbols, must have seemed unconvincing if not unrealistic; yet they knew of no alternative to suggest.

Unlike their contemporaries in literature, who used their newly found freedom of speech to delve into the roots of Armenian pagan

³⁸ Ibid., p. 114.

³⁹ In a short article in response to a question raised about the result of his research on khaz, Gomidas writes: "It is true, I have found the key to the Armenian khaz and am even reading the simple examples, but I have not reached the final point." *Tajar*, no. 10 (1914), p. 311. Komitas, *Hodvatsner ev usumnasirutyunner*, p. 166. See also Atayan, *Haykakan khazayin notagrutyune*, pp. 143-49.

⁴⁰ Gomidas reported certain aspects of his findings in musicalological journals and conferences. See Komitas, *Hodvatsner ev usumnasirutyunner*, pp. 153-65.

⁴¹ The Ottoman government harassed Dndesian for having published patriotic and religious songs in a collection titled *Nvagh Haykakan* [Armenian Music]. See Atayan, *Haykakan khazayin notagrutyune*, p. 127.

and medieval literature and found expression with a modified literary language, musicians of all generations in Constantinople (except for the select few discussed above) were not familiar with the oral tradition of Armenian folk music, which predated and later developed in parallel with the Christian music. So, some among them declared, privately and in the press as late as 1913 that “there exists no such thing as Armenian music, in the real sense of the word, . . . and whatever exists, bears Assyrian-Byzantine or Indian-Persian influences.”⁴²

Gomidas responded to such claims with a scathing article titled “Yes, Armenians Have Their Own Music.” He proceeded to defend his case with arguments based on his research as an ethno-musicologist and concluded that “a music is as true and national, as authentic and unique to itself as are its language and literature, because the music of each nation emerges and develops from the intonations of its language. The Armenian language has its particular intonation and therefore its corresponding music.”⁴³ Gomidas had in mind a new source of inspiration for Armenian music, namely, the Armenian folk songs, which he had already compiled and categorized during the twenty years of his ethno-musicological research in Armenian villages of the Araratian region.

In the mid-1800s, young musicians turned their attention to the contemporary sounds and forms of European vocal-instrumental music. Salon music of mostly piano and guitar became fashionable in the homes of the upper classes. European performers of classical music introduced the *bel canto* singing style and the rich tonal qualities of Western classical instruments. Homophonic choral and orchestral arrangements of marches, dances, romances, and lights and colors of stage sets provided an exciting contrast to the monophonic expressions of Eastern music and folk instruments. The urban society was fascinated with the technical achievements of European music.

East and West met in Constantinople. With a window opened to the outside world, the population was freed from their cultural isolation. Musically inclined young men were eager to study at the music conservatories in Europe. The prospect of being at the forefront of a new order of aesthetic sounds was not only refreshing

⁴² Komitas, *Hodvatsner ev usumnasirutyunner*, p. 47.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 49.

but also liberating. Between 1843 and 1848 alone, Armenian amiras interested in the intellectual progress of the nation sent about thirty promising young students to European (mostly French) universities.⁴⁴ Other youth went independently to Italian and Belgian music conservatories. Some of them preferred to stay in Europe and eventually enjoyed brilliant careers as performers and pedagogues.⁴⁵ Others returned home, energized with progressive musical ideas and placed their talents and expertise at the service of their fellow Armenians. Young musicians joined forces with poets and writers in a variety of cultural activities to enlighten the Armenian community and to cultivate a sense of national identity and unity.

In their rush to catch up with the West, the young musicians adopted Western forms and styles entirely in their original state: melodies intact with homophonic arrangements. They translated French and Italian lyrics on patriotic themes directly into the Armenian vernacular *ashkharhabar*, which became the modern Armenian literary language.⁴⁶ They paired their melodies with the impassioned calls of Armenian poets for national emancipation, disregarding the fact that the phrases and accents of the lyrics did not match the melodies. An examination of songbooks from this era reveals the mechanical application of Western harmonies in close imitation of European nationalistic songs. Additionally, foreign and Armenian translators, musicians, and poets are either unnamed or incorrectly credited.

Thus, European-educated musicians wittingly or unwittingly misled Armenian society into believing that these nationalistic songs, to which they were attached emotionally, were Armenian in text and melody.⁴⁷ Aware of the dominance of European music, Dndesian observed: "We can have national songs because we have national poetry; however, unless we instill good taste in music by

⁴⁴ Vahé Oshagan, "Modern Armenian Literature and Intellectual History from 1700 to 1915," in Hovannisian, ed., *Armenian People*, vol. 2, p. 151.

⁴⁵ For an impression of this scene, see the biographical sketch of one violin virtuoso, Kisag Vrooyr (1884-1973), who was born in Constantinople, educated in Europe, and earned his living as first violinist in Metro Goldwyn Studios in Los Angeles. See Anahit Tsitsikyan, *Haykakan agheghnayin arveste* [The Art of Armenian Strings] (Erevan: Sovetakan Grogh, 1997), pp. 94-103.

⁴⁶ Muradyan, *Urvagits*, p. 14.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 82-96.

educating the public, we can never have national music.”⁴⁸ There were exceptions, however, and some composers did create original works by synthesizing European music with the more traditional urban music of Constantinople. Notably, Dikran Chukhajian (1836-1898) emphasized national awareness in his compositions of vocal-instrumental pieces, which included the patriotic march “Zeytuntsineru kaylerke,” the romance “Karun,” the lyric song “Tsmern antsav” from the operetta *Leplepiji hor-hor*, and the libretto of the opera *Arshak II*.⁴⁹ His works reveal themes that suggest Armenia’s heroic past as the nation fought for its freedom and sought independence from foreign domination. Chukhajian became noted in Europe and in the Middle East as the “Armenian Verdi” and “Turkey’s Offenbach.”⁵⁰ He was the first composer in Turkey to compose his own Italian-style operas and French-style operettas.⁵¹ Gabriel Yeranyan, a colleague of Chukhajian, was also distinguished for the successful fusion of Eastern and Western musical traditions in his songs about the Armenian struggle for national freedom. Most familiar to the contemporary public are “Arik Haygazunk,” “Giligia,” and “Hayastan.”⁵²

No doubt the spirit behind the efforts of the Europeanized Armenian musicians was patriotic, but their music had no organic connection to the nation’s music. Despite the profusion and variety of their activities, Armenian musicians at this time were far removed from creating original works. Separated from the musical roots and poetic traditions of the homeland, they were wandering in the East-West musical world of Constantinople without a clear sense of an artistic direction, reaching for what was new and accessible. As composers, choral conductors, lecturers, music teachers, and cultural activists, this generation of Armenian musicians in Constantinople laid the groundwork for the next wave of professional composers. They established several musical journals and

⁴⁸ Ibid., p 121.

⁴⁹ See Nikoghos K. Tahmizian, *Tigran Chukhachian: Kianke ev steghtsagortsutine* [Dikran Chukhajian: His Life and Works] (Pasadena, CA: Drazarg, 1999).

⁵⁰ Muradyan, *Urvagits*, p. 187.

⁵¹ *Arshak II* and *Zemireh* operas, *Arif, Kyose-kehya* and *Leplepiji hor-hor*, operettas (in Italian, French, Turkish, and Armenian), among others, whose manuscripts have not survived.

⁵² For additional information and musical examples, see Muradyan, *Urvagits*, pp. 96-106.

associations and created a printing press to publish Armenian and Western notation systems, which they introduced serially in their journals.⁵³ They also introduced their patrons to Western music theory. Their choral, instrumental, and solo pieces were integrated into the productions of Armenian theater companies.⁵⁴ Chamber and symphonic pieces were composed for European instrumental ensembles and presented live on concert stages and in the salons of the amiras.

The new generation thus played a significant role in expanding the base of listeners. Young Armenian musicians active in Constantinople enriched the musical world of the capital by introducing European musicological principles and techniques. For the first time in the history of the Constantinopolitan music world, the ashughs no longer dominated the music scene in the higher echelons of the city's society, although Turkish music and folk instruments remained popular among the masses.

Gomidas

This was the state of Armenian music in Constantinople when Gomidas entered the cultural life of the city at the end of September 1910.⁵⁵ Gomidas—the consummate musician in the humble cloth of a celibate priest—had already achieved international fame as an ethnomusicologist, composer, conductor, and lecturer. He had accepted an enthusiastic invitation from the Armenian intellectual elite of Constantinople to establish his residence in the city.⁵⁶ Members of the community had been following reports of his

⁵³ *Knar arevelyan* (1858) was a monthly that published Eastern and Armenian melodies in European notation. *Knar haykakan* (1862) was an association and a journal by the same name that published popular and nationalistic songs. *Nvagh haykakan* was another such journal. See Anna A. Parsamyan and Markarit K. Harutyunyan, *Hay erazhshtutyan patmutyun* [History of Armenian Music] (Erevan: Loys, 1968), p. 80. See also Muradyan, *Urvagits*, pp. 44, 93-96.

⁵⁴ These included the Arevelian Tadron, Ottoman Opera Theater, Vartovyan, and Benglian theatrical companies, which presented both European and Armenian plays and musicals and for which they had in-house vocalists and choral and instrumental musical ensembles. See Parsamyan and Harutyunyan, *Hay erazhshtutyan patmutyun*, p. 81.

⁵⁵ Gaspar N. Gasparyan, ed., *Zhamanakakisnere Komitasi masin* [Contemporaries about Gomidas] (Erevan: Haypethrat, 1960), p. 21.

⁵⁶ Muradyan, *Aknark*, pp. 168-69.

activities in the fields of music theory and performance and had read about his lectures on comparative analysis of Armenian, Turkish, Persian, and Kurdish music, which he had delivered (personally singing examples of each style) at musicological conferences in Berlin and Paris.⁵⁷ They knew of his vast collection of Armenian folk and sacred music, which he had selected for their musical value and authentic indigenous Armenian origins. They had heard that a select compilation of songs, cultivated with polyphonic arrangements for a cappella choral singing was being readied for publication,⁵⁸ and they had read rave reviews of his performance as conductor of this music before packed concert halls in the capitals of Europe and the Middle East.⁵⁹ His friends and members of the literary and musical community, therefore, wanted him to bring his talents to Constantinople. They eagerly sought his cooperation, to join hands in their common cause of awakening fellow Armenians to their collective cultural identity, of enlightening the minds and spirits of society, of unchaining them from their apathy, despair, and frustration at having to bear their own subjugation for so long.

Gomidas believed that all of these goals were within reach. The native sounds of Armenian songs, which he valued as miniature gems, could restore the bruised psyche of his people. But he needed a cadre of committed workers. To this end, he had developed a comprehensive music education program and the necessary teaching materials,⁶⁰ which might, at last, find receptive audiences in the small but forward-looking group of musicians and writers in Constantinople. The city elite assured Gomidas that he would receive the solid support of a committee organized expressly to advance his most cherished project—a music conservatory for the

⁵⁷ See reviews and letters from European musicologists attending the first conference of this newly instituted society. Gomidas was a founding member and in 1899 presented a paper on “The Sacred and Secular Music of the Armenians.” Gasparyan, *Zhamanakakitsnere Komitasi masin*, pp. 11-13.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 115, 121-22, 126.

⁵⁹ Prior to his stay in Constantinople, he gave concerts in Tiflis (1905), Paris (1906), Baku, Zurich, Lausanne, Berne, and Geneva (1908), and in the Armenian provinces.

⁶⁰ Gomidas had presented these in a letter addressed to Catholicos Madteos II in May 1910, seven months prior to arriving in Constantinople. See Komitas, *Hodvatsner ev usumnasirutyunner*, p. 51.

young generation of Armenians.⁶¹ This promise was like a salve for the humiliation and bitter disappointment he was feeling at the time. Catholicos Matteos Izmirlian at Echmiadzin had just dismissed his earnest request for financial support for a professional approach to the music education of the young seminarians in the monastery where he was the choir-master.⁶² Besides, he yearned to move away from the oppressive environment of Echmiadzin,⁶³ where incessant gossip, criticism, and condemnation of his involvement with musical activities outside the monastery hounded him at every turn. He missed the sense of freedom that he had experienced in Europe, the freedom to imagine, to create, and to interact with brilliant musicologists and composers.⁶⁴ The thought of living and working among independent thinkers and enlightened minds in a large cosmopolitan city, like Constantinople, appealed to him, especially with the kind of moral and financial backing that he had been promised.

Gomidas' first success in the city was a full concert program of Armenian songs in two sections: first, sacred hymns of the Armenian Church, followed by lyric folk songs of the Armenian peasants. This concert was presented in Bdi Shan theater on November 21, 1910. The audience heard beautiful shades of polyphonic music from a hastily assembled chorus of 300 talented, albeit inexperienced, young singers. The power of his conductor's baton and his baritone solos transported the audience to the mystic past of an Armenian monastery and to the beautiful landscapes of the Armenian countryside.⁶⁵ His talent for imaginative interpretations of the sharagans, erks, elaborate dagh-arias, and the Armenian peasant's intuitive gift for the seemingly simple yet inventive melodies touched and excited his listeners beyond their expectations. The international press praised the program and its repeat performances in superlative tones. Gomidas became the

⁶¹ See Gasparyan, *Zhamanakakitsnere Komitasi masin*, p. 127, for Gomidas' letter from Constantinople to Marguerite Papayan in 1909. See also Muradyan, *Urvagits*, p. 251, for details on Gomidas' plans for a conservatory in Constantinople.

⁶² Ruben Terlemezyan, *Komitas* (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1992), pp. 51-52.

⁶³ See Gasparyan, *Zhamanakakitsnere Komitasi masin*, p. 123, for Gomidas' letter from Echmiadzin in 1909 to Marguerite Papayan.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 118.

⁶⁵ See comments and reviews, Muradyan, *Urvagits*, p. 248; Gasparyan, *Zhamanakakitsnere Komitasi masin*, p. 22.

envy of non-Armenians attending these concerts. At least one article in the Greek press in Alexandria, Egypt, asked: “When will God create a Gomidas among the Greeks who will save the ancient Hellenic music from loss?”⁶⁶

Yet, to the Armenian Church in the Ottoman capital, Gomidas was a constant embarrassment. He was simply a priest who was investing an improper amount of interest and time in secular music. In fact, this concert of Armenian indigenous music, heard in Constantinople for the very first time, had met with fierce objections from the Armenian patriarch.⁶⁷ He had requested that Gomidas omit the Armenian sacred songs in the first section of the program because, the patriarch argued, it was sacrilegious to present them in the secular environment of a theater. Gomidas impatiently replied that he had in his pocket a written approval from Catholicos Mgrdich (Mkrtich) Khrimian “Hayrig” for the program.⁶⁸ Having registered a major success in Constantinople, Gomidas charged into the musical life of the city. With a great burst of energy and good humor, he dashed from choral rehearsals to children’s music classes, from delivering talks to conducting concerts, from lectures and concert tours around Constantinople, in cities of Europe, and the Middle East, back to Constantinople to periods set aside for research and composition.⁶⁹ He also joined heated discussions in the press, with insightful observations and sharp-witted prose. He hoped to shed some light on the uninformed and insecure posture of the composers and clergy toward their own musical heritage, their indigenous Armenian songs. He was occasionally relieved and encouraged by visits from his artist friends.⁷⁰

As a Turkish speaking Armenian until the age of twelve, Gomidas had not been raised with Armenian folk songs. He had heard them

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 25.

⁶⁷ Muradyan, *Urvagits*, pp. 244-50; Samson G. Gasparian, *Komitas: Kianke, gortsuneyutyune, steghtsagortsutyune* [Gomidas: Life, Activities, Creations] (Erevan: Haypetrat, 1961), p. 84.

⁶⁸ Gomidas was referring to a letter of recommendation that Catholicos Mgrdich I (1892-1906) had given him on a previous occasion.

⁶⁹ In a letter addressed to the famous poet Hovhannes Tumanian in 1913, Gomidas wrote: “I am already settled in Bolis, and started my work. I have my private school where I am preparing choral directors and singers. I have a 300-member group of mixed voices, named ‘Gusan.’ I am preparing concerts and giving lessons; here it is, my new life.”

⁷⁰ Shahverdyan, *Hay erazhshtutyan patmutyan aknarkner*, pp. 446-47.

for the first time as a teenager on a summer vacation to his friend's village of Keorpalu.⁷¹ He must have been deeply touched by this experience because he began searching for additional examples of this Armenian village music. Gomidas meticulously transcribed countless songs on the spot as they were being improvised spontaneously during the daily experiences of Armenian village life. These were beautifully crafted melodies and poetic verses created and re-created by the Armenian peasantry up to the twentieth century.

His comparative analysis of Persian, Turkish, Arabic, Kurdish, and Armenian songs identified the distinguishing features of a developed Armenian musical vocabulary: its modal system, melodic turns and phrases, rhythmic patterns, metric structures, and emotive expressive styles.⁷² Combined, these aesthetic elements created a musical idiom that was intimately connected with the structure of the Armenian language, traditions, and customs. He was convinced that by making the music and its theoretical analysis available, he would lay a foundation upon which future composers could build new interpretations of the traditional, could revitalize the sacred and the secular traditions of Armenian music. Such accomplishments, he hoped, would also boost the national self-image of the present and future generations of Armenians. His goal, however, was not fully realized during his lifetime, although the survivors of the genocide, scattered around the globe, turned to this music as a source of comfort and inspiration.

Thanks to Gomidas, the ethnomusicologist, the composer, the conductor, and the educator, the folk songs of the unassuming Armenian peasant and the sacred hymns of the obscure Armenian monk were, for the first time, brought out from the villages and monasteries of historic Armenia and Cilicia to the concert stages of Constantinople, among other capitals. The final polyphonic version of the badarak for male voices, on which Gomidas had worked intermittently for many years, was scheduled for performance at the patriarchal church in the Kumkapı quarter on Easter morning of 1915. Instead, he and more than two hundred other Armenian intellectuals were arrested and exiled into the

⁷¹ Izabella R. Yolyan, *Komitas* (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1969), pp. 17-18.

⁷² V. Korganov, *Caucasian Music* (Tiflis, 1908), p. 82, cited by Gasparyan, *Komitas*, p. 20.

interior, where most of them were murdered.⁷³

Gomidas left a great deal of work unfinished. Foremost on his list of projects was the publication of his conclusive findings on the medieval khaz symbols. This would have provided a definitive picture of Armenian musicology, formulated in academic terminology, which could be appreciated universally. Still, Gomidas accomplished much and received a level of recognition well above what most artists could hope to attain. The public appreciation accorded to Gomidas was especially noteworthy, for he achieved his objectives without the backing of the state, an institution, or even an established music conservatory, which, though promised to him, never materialized.⁷⁴ Perhaps had it not been for the adversarial attitude of the Armenian clergy,⁷⁵ the indifference of economically powerful classes, and the devastation of the Genocide, Gomidas would have witnessed Armenian music among the most advanced and universally appreciated musical cultures of the world. It is worth noting that, even after having experienced the horrors and misery of the Armenians during the deportations and massacres, he persevered briefly upon returning to Constantinople. Just before he lost his creative drive and sank into a severe depression, he put the final touches on his composition of “Armenian Dance Miniatures for Piano.”⁷⁶

Conclusion

After four centuries of Persian-Arabic maqams, Ottoman Turkish music of the sufis, Turkish popular songs of ashughs, and Turkified church songs of Armenian deacons, the musical world of the Armenians in Constantinople finally experienced a revival. It was invigorated by the new sounds and sights of musical performances

⁷³ The horror which he experienced during the Armenian Genocide led to a severe depression, and he was committed to a sanatorium in France for the rest of his life.

⁷⁴ Obstacles to this project included insufficient funding and delays because of the sultan’s wish to establish a state conservatory in Constantinople; in fact, the sultan asked Gomidas to head up that project. See Matevos Muradyan, “Azgayin erazhshtakan uzheri patrastrman Komitasyan tsragirnere” [Gomidas’ Plans for the Preparation of National Musical Forces], in *Komitaskan*, ed. Robert A. Atayan et al. (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1981), vol. 1, p. 238.

⁷⁵ See Gasparian, *Zhamanakakitsnere Komitasi masin*, pp. 116-17, 123-24, 126.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 40.

coming from Western Europe. Armenian musicians educated in Western conservatories began to use the more developed and refined European instruments. They borrowed salon music and patriotic melodies as they composed new forms for instrumental and vocal ensembles. They experimented with creating a fusion of the Eastern with the Western musical traditions in their compositions for the theater, opera house, and concert hall. They were successful in introducing polyphony to Armenian sacred chants and to indigenous folk melodies. Music education, publications, performances of a varied repertoire and musical styles appealed to the larger part of the Armenian society in the Ottoman capital. Thus, forward-looking, dedicated Armenian musicians and musicologists in Constantinople enriched and expanded the musical world of all Armenians in the Great City.



Gomidas (Komitas)

